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The Self of the Coach:

Conceptualization, Issues, and Opportunities for Practitioner Development

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Abstract

This paper offers a conceptual and developmental proposition based on the centrality of the practitioner's self in the achievement of coaching outcomes. The central role of the self of the coach is established through a theoretical comparison with a competency (knowledge and skills) frame. Positioning the self in this way acknowledges the complexity and unpredictability of the coaching process and aligns with a complex-adaptive-system perspective on coaching. In turn, it provides a platform for a professional-practice view of the self as the main *instrument* of coaching and, further, a developmental proposition for the good use of self as an instrument. Three main conditions for the good use of self as an instrument are proposed: understanding the instrument, looking after the instrument, and checking the instrument for quality and sensitivity. Each condition is discussed, and the implications for coaches and educators of coaching in relation to initial training and the continuing professional development of coaches are considered. In keeping with the underpinning theory of self around which it is built, this paper gives witness to multiple voices: theory, practice, and development.

Keywords: complexity, development of self, self-deception, coaching supervision

A long-term ambition of coaching communities is for coaching to be knowledge-based (Gray, 2011), meaning that knowledge is "a body of information, theories, methodologies broadly considered to have passed some tests of validity" (Alvesson, 2001, p. 867). This ambition is in line with an intention to see coaching as a profession (Gray, 2011). However, there is an inherent paradox in coaching, as well as in other complex professions. The knowledge of coaching is important, but saying that coaching is a direct and systematic application of such knowledge is misleading. Many authors have argued that there is a discrepancy between the rational model of knowledge and the uncertainty, complexity, instability, and uniqueness that characterize the day-to-day work of professionals (Alvesson, 2001; Cavanagh & Lane, 2012; Garvey, 2011; Jones & Corner, 2012; Schön, 1983; Stacey, 2003, 2012; Svensson, 1990). This complexity means that professional work is very difficult to evaluate and particularly to attribute the result of the work to a particular model of knowledge or the professional expertise of a practitioner (Erwin, 1997; Jones & Corner, 2012; Stacey, 2003). Many factors in addition to knowledge need to be considered as influencing the original choice of the coach and type of coaching by clients and consequent evaluation of coaching services. Such factors may include the image of the organization or of a professional, the rhetoric of expertise, and the relationship with clients (Alvesson, 2001; Fichman & Levinthal, 1991).

The importance of the role of relationship is particularly supported by research in coaching and in counselling (Baron & Morin, 2009; De Haan, Culpin, & Curd, 2011; De Haan, Duckworth, Birch, & Jones, 2013; Rowan & Jacobs, 2002; Wampold, 2001). This research suggests that the relationship with a client is the main contributing factor to the results of the process rather than the specific orientation and training of the practitioner that includes skills and knowledge (Baron & Morin, 2009; De Haan et al., 2013; Wampold, 2001). At the same time the focus on relationship as a methodology for enhancing the quality of coaching by the practitioner is also problematic. If we adopt an idea of complexity, for

example looking at the situation in terms of complex adaptive systems, we have to admit that the participants, their relationship, and the context of engagement are in a state of flux (Cavanagh & Lane, 2012; Jones & Corner, 2012; Stacey, 2003) and are therefore elusive in terms of being influenced by the coach. De Haan et al. (2013) also admit that the coaching relationship is not a homogeneous concept, and identifying definitive elements of it is not an easy task, particularly for practitioners.

The messages of this nature are challenging for professional coaches, researchers of coaching, educators of coaches, and, from a different angle, professional bodies that aim to create benchmarks for practice. In this paper I would like to explore one of the implications of embracing a more relativistic but more accurate view on coaching that elicits the concerns of coaches and educators of coaches. The recognition of a connection on a personal level in coaching and the role of the qualities of the coach as a person come again and again from many studies that use different methodologies (Baron & Morin, 2009; Bono, Purvanova, Towler, & Peterson, 2009). This indicates the need for a conceptualization of such data and the development of a theory that acknowledge the role of self in a coach, beginning with an inquiry into the role of self in coaching.

In any profession, the way we are as individuals intertwines with our professional knowledge and skills. Alvesson (2001), for example, argued that in complex professions "it is impossible to separate knowledge and 'pure' intellectual skills (symbolist-analytical work) from flexibility, organizing capacity, a high level of motivation, social skills, less esoteric technical skills." However, in some professions these expressions of the "professional as a person" matter even more. The nature of coaching requires that the practitioners connect with clients on a personal level, creating relationships in which the clients' trust is based not only on the coach's skills and knowledge but also on the feeling that the coach is fundamentally on their side and a trustworthy human being in this relationship (Cox, Bachkirova, &

Clutterbuck, 2014; De Haan et al., 2013; Western, 2012). Clients often bring for coaching the issues that affect their whole lives. I would argue that the interventions of the coach are initiated not only from the knowledge and understanding of the clients' situation, context, psychological makeup and goals but also from the personal resonating with all of these in the moment and, therefore, from the self of the coach. These interventions are the expression of the coach's life experiences, current worldview, and the stage of his or her personal learning journey. On this basis, it is possible to say that the coach is the main instrument of coaching.

Such a claim potentially attracts both criticism and support. It may, for example, be considered too demanding for professional coaches because it requires greater emotional labor (Hoschild, 2012) than a more technical approach (Schön, 1983). Indeed, some coaching models, in line with psychotherapeutic traditions that influence them (e.g., cognitive-behavioral), may minimize the role of the coach's personal engagement, whereas others (e.g., gestalt, existential) may highlight it (Cox et al., 2014; Myers, 2014). Thus the coach might take a stance as a professional with a necessary distance and intention for objectivity, a stance that could be jeopardized by personal connection. Alternatively, the client may be conceptualized as simply an "advanced client" who is not concerned with the boundaries between personal and professional. I would argue, however, that the current proposition on the role of self in coaching stands outside this apparent dichotomy: It assumes the pan-theoretical position that even a distant and objective stance of the practitioner is still an expression of self and might have been chosen/developed in the first place to reflect an individual's personality and worldview.

It might be clear by now that this proposition of the self as an instrument of coaching does not mainly imply a uniform manifestation of what the coach does as an instrument. Although some specific elements of the 'use of self' in the process of coaching can be indicated (e.g. self-disclosure, immediacy, use of intuition) an overemphasis on these skills

would lead to the same expert-based stance on the professional practice, only more sophisticated. The role of self of the coach that this paper advocates is about self-expression of the coach's self with all its complexity and uniqueness within a model of practice that is congruent to this self.

There are two main consequences of seeing the coach as the main instrument of coaching. The first is that all instruments will be different according to the unique nature of each coach. It highlights the value of diversity in coaching in contrast to an unjustified degree of universality. The uniqueness of coaching is in the ability to meet diverse needs of clients according to their specific situations and individual differences. Therefore diversity in coaches as instruments of coaching seems congruent with the diversity of clients and their needs. In this light, although universality of some knowledge and tools of the coach is important, the apparent intention to mold the coach into a "one fit for all" approach to coaching, which seems to be advocated by some professional bodies and training organizations, has been recently strongly critiqued (Bachkirova & Lawton Smith, 2015; Garvey, 2011).

The second consequence of the proposition that we are the main instruments of coaching is relevant for the development of coaches. Traditional focus of programmes for education and continuing development of coaches is usually concerned with skills and knowledge required for delivery of coaching – foundation of practice. The focus on the self and reflexivity of the coach is the next step in coach development, enabling coaches to create their own unique style of practice and to be authentic in their role of a coach.

The logic of this metaphor of the self suggests that the self as an instrument can be put to good use and that under some conditions it could be used more effectively. This paper will explore three conditions for good use of self as an instrument. My intent in doing this is to pose some important questions for educators, policy-makers, and especially practitioners with

respect to any type or context of coaching. I hope that for practitioners this discussion can be seen as an exercise in enhancing reflexivity as a unique human capacity of being conscious of one's own actions, thoughts, feelings, and the effects of these. Paying attention to and being aware of oneself and one's experiences means being reflexive about one's practice. This is also what coaching practitioners aim to achieve for their clients in relation to their life and practice (Bachkirova, 2011, 2015; Garvey, 2011; Jones & Corner, 2012; Stacey, 2012).

Conditions for Good Use of Self as an Instrument

For a long time and in different settings I have been asking coaches to imagine what particular instrument of coaching they could be. They were free to imagine anything after my initial suggestion of some potential images—for instance, a Swiss army knife (indicating multiplicity of skills applied), a drill (capacity to dig into the issue that client brings), or a violin (ability to tune in into the client's state of mind and thus to enable their own search for truth). I am still amazed by the variety of metaphors this exercise generates and by the discussions we have had about why a particular image resonates with a coach and what personal values about coaching it implies.

The above exercise enhances reflexivity by bringing a different modality to what could be just an analytic inquiry. At the same time, the metaphor of the instrument can also deepen reflection further by extending the analogy of the instrument into a more detailed examination of the way it is used and the enabling conditions for this use to be effective. Table 1 describes these conditions in terms of their meaning and importance (Why), the mechanisms of their influence (What and How), and the context of their implementation (Where/When). Then each condition is explored separately. Although each condition is described as distinct it is important to emphasise that all three of them are interconnected and influential in their combination.

Table 1

Three Conditions for Good Use of Self as an Instrument

Conditions for good use of self as an instrument	**Why**	**What and How**	**Where/When**
Understanding your self as an instrument	Congruence between you and your approach	Learning what your self is and how it changes	Personal reflection, coaching, therapy
Looking after your self as an instrument	Sustaining energy, preventing burnout	Appropriate life-style, providing emotional space, etc.	In any appropriate place and time
Checking the quality of the instrument	Checking for self-deception and bad habits	Developing as an individual and practitioner, understanding the nature of self-deception	Self-reflection, continuing professional development, supervision

Condition 1: Understanding Your Self as an Instrument

The importance of understanding one's self follows from the need for coaches to align their approaches to coaching with whom they are as individuals. It means that the personal values and beliefs of a coach are expressed in the model that is used, that one's individual characteristics are congruent with his or her style of coaching, and that the coach is aware of how the current state of self and the long-term changes it undergoes affect the way he or she coaches. This condition implies engaging in the process of learning about one's self, which is a natural expectation for those who are in the business of helping clients to increase their self-understanding. Currently there are no explicit requirements for coaches, even professional ones, to undergo coaching themselves before they start practicing. It is unfortunate that in this regard we do not follow the footsteps of other professions such as counselling. Although personal coaching would not guarantee a significant change in the level of self-awareness and self-understanding of the coach, it would allow for, nevertheless, the experience of being a client and therefore an opportunity to imagine oneself in the position of the other.

In the current situation this condition is usually satisfied by engaging in self-reflection, undertaking supervision, and participating in various developmental activities with a focus on one's self. Highly developmental in this regard is the articulation of the coach's own model of coaching, which can demonstrate the alignment of personal philosophy, the purpose of coaching, and the process that allows this to happen (Bachkirova & Lawton Smith, 2015). Being involved with my colleagues in various forms of assessment of coaches, I have observed that purpose and process are rarely a problem, as they are often articulated in the competency frameworks for the accreditation of coaches and in training programs that focus on one particular model of coaching. The most challenging part is philosophy of coaching, which requires one to start from the beginning and explain why this purpose of coaching is chosen and why this process is suitable. It requires making it explicit how a coach sees human nature, the mechanisms of change, and what is possible to influence under particular circumstances. It also implies other questions that connect the personal values of the self with coaching practice—for instance, asking oneself as a coach: What are you trying to achieve in your coaching practice? Why is this important to you? To whom do you feel accountable in your coaching practice? To clients? To relevant organizations? To our profession? To society? To humanity?

Other difficult questions require coaches to look even deeper into the philosophy of the approach. For example, what is the focus of your coaching: to change the self or to change the external circumstances, particularly when there is a visible clash between them? Is your coaching for the adaptation of the client or for his or her emancipation? Do we need to question normative assumptions, structural power relationships, and inequality or should we learn to live with these? Even in relation to the most precious word in coaching—*change*—it is important to consider what the ideal balance between stability and change is. There is an obvious drive for individuals, organizations, and society to preserve their

essence, to stay the way they are, but there is also a need for change and progress. I would argue that if the model of coaching does not include such considerations it remains shallow. Even when clients formulate very specific coaching goals, it is naïve to assume that coaching is unaffected by the views that coaches hold. They may never have articulated these views, but this would mean that these same influences are still working, while remaining unexamined.

Another level of complexity emerges even when we can articulate our philosophy. We may hold an illusion that this philosophy is entirely our own and a product of careful and measured reasoning. However, as advocated in this paper, it is inevitable that we are influenced by a whole range of factors (historical, cultural, political, psychological, and professional) and there are many discourses associated with these factors (Bachkirova, 2011; Garvey, 2011; Western, 2012). We are also conditioned by what may seem like very distant and abstract general paradigms, such as modernism and postmodernism, with different positions on what is considered as truth, reality, and science (Fishman, 1999). It is the latter paradigm, which recognizes complexity and uncertainty, particularly in the social world, that makes prediction and control difficult in coaching and in other complex professions (Garvey, 2011; Jones & Corner, 2012; Stacy, 2003).

Even when coaches are not aware of such levels of influence, it is possible to notice that when we talk about coaching there seem to be two different languages. One is more technical (e.g., intervention, evidence base, contract, effectiveness, impact). The other language comes across as more personal (e.g., meaning, desire, connection, dialogue, tuning in). It seems that for some coaches the modernist influences are strong and prominent. Others appear to be more aligned with postmodernism and humanism. However, there are many more who seem to be alternating between the two, holding at the same time incompatible beliefs and manifesting inconsistency in their approaches—as if we have two different selves

who take the lead in different periods and situations. It is important to examine these selves and make them more available to awareness, thereby recognizing influences of these most abstract types of discourses. I suggest calling these selves a *competent self* and a *dialogic self* and compare them in Table 2.

Table 2

Comparison between Competent and Dialogic Selves

Aspects	**Competent Self**	**Dialogic Self**
Role of the coach	Expert at least in the process of coaching	Partner in a dialogue
Skills and tools	Are main assets of the coach	Are secondary in comparison to collaborative engagement
Concerned with	Good practice, effectiveness, impact	Joined meaning making in the session
Coaching relationship	Is a means for successful work (development of trust)	Is a purpose in itself – a model of joined inquiry
Communication is	Dialectic (dealing with explicit meaning of statements)	Dialogic (attending to implicit intentions behind words
Aiming for	Resolutions and action points	Often does not lead to closure and appreciate the value of issues remaining unresolved.
Potential problems	Excessive structures and frameworks may stultify the process and reduce creativity	Coaching process without structures could move around in circles without benchmarks for progress

The competent self is strongly aligned with the idea that success in coaching requires certain skills and methods that come from recognized fields of knowledge, and these skills and methods thus provide a solid base from which other interventions can follow. This self aims to be, or assumes the role of, an expert—if not in the content of the session, then at least

in the process of it. The competent self is concerned with good practice, effectiveness of learning, and hard evidence of impact.

The dialogic self does not believe in high predictability of success, recognizing that many factors influence the coaching engagement. According to this self, the session is about joint meaning-making with the client. Skills and techniques, although useful, play a very secondary role in the coaching process. It means that the truth cannot be held within a single mind and might only emerge in a genuine dialogue. Bakhtin (1973) called this type of dialogue a *carnival*: a context in which individual voices are heard, flourish, and interact together. In creating this term Bakhtin was inspired by Dostoevsky's polyphonic style, which presents each character as distinct, but at the same time the reader can clearly observe how each character is influencing the other. So the dialogic self of the coach aims to facilitate a process in which coach and client are equally contributing to the meaning and development of the client's situation.

It may appear that there is no contradiction between these selves; the difference, though subtle, is significant. For example, the relationship is important for both selves. However, for the competent self, it has a 'means to a different end' value as a factor for influencing the client and for achieving an effective coaching engagement, with the recognition that this process may not be effective without trust. For the dialogic self the relationship is not a means to an end; it is a purpose in itself, a foundation of the dialogue. Another interesting difference could be illustrated using Sennett's (2012) distinction between dialectic and dialogic communication. Dialectic communication (more aligned with a competent self), however useful, deals with the explicit meaning of statements—as, for example, "clean language" approaches to coaching suggest (Lawley & Tompkins, 2000). Dialogic process involves a type of listening that attends to the implicit intentions behind actual words and to an engagement with multiple meanings that can be constructed together.

Dialectic process aims for resolution and action points, whereas dialogic processes often do not lead to closure and appreciate the value of issues remaining unresolved (Sennett, 2012).

Unfortunately, both selves may lead to specific problems in coaching practice. A competent self's concern for structures, frameworks, and evaluation may stultify the coaching process and reduce creativity, and thus the quality of engagement, because of the compliance to external expectations. On the other hand, a dialogic self's resistance to structures may lead to situations in which the coaching process moves around in circles without benchmarks for progress.

What is important, then, for understanding your self as an instrument of coaching? The awareness of the various influences is useful because it helps to identify what tendencies in the coach are triggered by what types of general discourses and which ones the coach is most prone to adapt in practice. This awareness is important because it helps to anticipate the issues that might follow these two tendencies. As a self-reflection test for the tendency for competent or dialogic selves, coaches may examine their attitudes to some very dividing questions—for example, where do they stand in relation to the practice of ranking schools and universities (league tables), or what do they think about giving prisoners the right to vote? Then they may ask themselves to be as honest as possible about what they feel and what their feeling say about their two selves.

This awareness can also bring to light inconsistencies in our models of practice. When recognizing inconsistency as such, some coaches might not see it as a problem. They might be in agreement with Walt Whitman, who once said, "Do I contradict myself? Very well, then I contradict myself, I am large, I contain multitudes." With this level of the self-awareness combining both selves is not an issue. Others might be embarrassed to catch themselves in inconsistencies in beliefs or behaviors—for instance, believing in the unique self-expression of individuals but creating or complying with uniform competence

frameworks; hating hierarchies but developing or applying for categories of professionalism, such as master-coach; or believing in the self-determination of the client but subordinating the needs of the client to the needs of the organization.

I would argue that it is important to approach inconsistencies with curiosity rather than judgment, which would allow for a genuine exploration of conditioning. There is no shame in being conditioned: We are open systems that are permeable to influences. What we can do is to learn about these influences and understand them as coming from the past and, because of that, tinting the view of the present. This understanding might be more important than an ambition to eliminate them, if we believe Krishnamurti (1991, p. 101), who said, "When the past ceases to contaminate, reality *is*. There is no need to seek it out."

Condition 2: Looking after Your Self as an Instrument

Looking after your self as an instrument should be reasonably straightforward and unproblematic for coaches who are often in the position of helping clients to look after themselves in relation to work. Surprisingly, this is not that straightforward. For example, it is well documented that burnout is quite common in helping professions (Alarcon, Eschleman, & Bowling, 2009; Corey, Corey, Corey, & Callanan, 2014; Shaufeli, Leiter, & Maslach, 2009). Corey et al. (2014) describe it as intellectual, emotional, and spiritual depletion. One of the reasons for burnout is that helping professions attract people who have a "calling" to take care of other people's psychological, social, and physical problems (Pines et al., 1981). They also find helping others fulfilling and take too many opportunities to help without sufficient consideration of their own limitations in terms of energy, emotional burden, and resilience.

Also surprising is that there is no literature addressing burnout in coaches, as if they are immune to emotional depletion. Burnout is mentioned in the coaching literature only when coaches help their clients deal with the issue. Even more surprising is when some

experts in coaching supervision (Hawkins & Smith, 2013) changed one of the functions of supervision; referred to in counselling as *restorative* (Proctor, 2008) or *supportive* (Kadushin, 1992), they called it *resourcing*, as if coaches are superhuman and do not need restoration or support. The purpose of this new function is to deal with some specific emotions of coaches, which may "soon lead to less than effective practitioners" (Hawkins & Smith, 2013, p.174). The concern for effectiveness of coaches is, of course, important but so is the consideration of the coaches' health and well-being.

There are a number of reasons for looking after one's self as an instrument. There is an expectation that coaches should always be in good form in sessions, with a positive attitude of mind, fully focused on the client, and so on. However, this requires a great deal of energy, which is not unlimited even if coaches have an appropriate lifestyle and give themselves emotional space to build and replenish this energy. Burnout happens when this energy is depleted without an opportunity to replenish it. In the substantial literature on burnout in helping professions, the explanation of what causes this state is complex. It may include various psychological factors but also social and organizational ones (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002). In the counselling literature, burnout is sometimes described as a result of stress and the need to stay with negative emotion of the client. In coaching, burnout might be associated with the need to sustain positivity and a high level of optimism that has been called "emotional labour" (Hoschild, 2012). Other authors explain burnout as the lack of balance between receiving and giving (Hawkins & Shohet, 2006). It could be argued, however, that the coaches do receive in the coaching session and do enjoy the process but can still accumulate the state that leads to burnout.

There are also specific features of the working conditions of external professional coaches and of coaches internal to organizations that emphasize the need for looking after oneself as an instrument. Independent coaches often take as many assignments as come their

way—for financial reasons or out of the fear that saying “no” might damage their reputations. Internal coaches are sometimes allocated a prescribed number of clients without consideration for other work they do and the emotional labor involved in the process of coaching. However, it has been reported that the topic of basic care and prevention of burnout in other helping professions is not often addressed in training programs (Skovholt, Grier, & Hanson, 2001). I am not sure if the satiation is any better in the training of coaches.

In this paper the condition of looking after oneself as an instrument of coaching is highlighted in order to draw the attention of coaches and educators of coaching to potential issues and to the need to observe when and how they can take some measures for prevention of exhaustion of both physical and mental resources. It is interesting to notice that knowing the specific symptoms of burnout is not enough; there are too many. Among them there are physiological symptoms, such as fatigue, insomnia, and a whole range of health-related issues related to weakened immune systems. Psychological symptoms include emotional depletion, unreasonable need to be alone, irritability, loss of sense of perspective, loss of interest in life, and so on (Freudenberger, 1974). My own and others’ experiences suggest that knowing the phases of burnout rather than the symptoms is more useful; knowing the phases provides an opportunity to become attuned to the subtle signs of burnout rather than wait for a full-blown condition. Table 3 describes these phases from the literature for helping professions (Edelwich & Brodsky, 1980), but with some adjustments that can be justified for the coaching context.

Awareness of the phases is important because coaches may notice them in good time to prevent sliding down to the next phase. For example the phase of big illusion is a good time to check the reality and make adjustments to the intentions and goals. At the phase of frustration, energy can be channelled towards a possible change. More radical changes can be

contemplated at two other phases that may require help from others if involvement becomes difficult.

Table 3

Phases of Burnout in Coaches

No	Phase	Description (attitudes, emotions)	Description (behaviour)
1	Phase of 'big purpose'	Life is work! Coaches feel that what they do is the most important and even their mission to change the world.	They impose too-high demands on themselves and others. Add new assignments with high frequency. Advocate coaching at every opportunity.
2	Phase of frustration	Too-high expectations lead to disappointment with themselves and their clients. High irritability, low threshold of emotions.	In spite of accumulated fatigue they continue the same working pattern. Health problems often follow.
3	Phase of decreased vitality	Overwhelming sense of exhaustion. Psychological stuckness in an adult ego state using transactional-analysis terms.	Periods of rest are not sufficient to replenish energy and motivation. Find that they have too hard to stay present in the session. Self-development stops.
4	Phase of apathy	Loss of meaning in work.	Withdrawal.

Note: Adapted and extended from Edelwich & Brodsky (1980).

Condition 3: Checking the Quality of the Instrument

It is possible from time to time to lose sensitivity and thus the quality of the coaching engagement. As with any instrument, coaches need to be regularly checked and "recalibrated." For example, coaches may develop habits in their approaches to work. These

habits could be formed from patterns of actions that were once effective but then crystallized and became rigid rather than staying flexible. If unexamined they could lead to coaches becoming self-complacent or feeling that their practice is becoming stale.

Another issue that can undermine the sensitivity of the instrument and quality of engagement is self-deception in coaches. Although the discussion of this phenomenon may be challenging, concerns about the quality of the coaching process make this topic important for practice. The phenomenon of self-deception as part of human nature is widely discussed in an enormous amount of literature (e.g., Clegg & Moissinac, 2005; Fingarette, 2000; Gergen, 1985; Rorty, 1994; Von Hippel & Trivers, 2011), with various explanations of self-deception from different theoretical perspectives (Bachkirova, 2015). Although there is no agreement on many issues, even in defining self-deception, it is accepted that nobody is immune from it and that self-deception may happen as a result of self-protection or the desire for gain (Fingarette, 2000; Kenrick & White, 2011; Sackeim, 1983; Von Hippel & Trivers, 2011).

Both clients and coaches “filter information for personal reasons” (this is one of the ways to describe self-deception as a common phenomenon) and act accordingly. Coaches may well identify the instances of self-deception in their clients—for instance, false evaluations of their actions and abilities. They are in a good position to help their clients improve their quality of perception in order for them to engage with their environment in the most effective way and fulfill their realistic expectations (Bachkirova, 2015). However, there are also many examples of coaches themselves being prone to self-deception and missing many signs of their own filtering of information. For example, coaches may believe that they never give advice, can provide complete confidentiality, and do not coach if they have conflicts of interest. They may overestimate their capacity and fail to refer a client to a different specialist. They may not notice how their personal agenda or historical pattern of

behavior prevents them from challenging the client or seeing the situation from a different angle. Here are two relevant examples described by highly experienced coaches in the research on self-deception in coaching (Bachkirova, 2015):

> I can deceive myself that I'm doing this because my client is not fulfilling their potential. Therefore I need to help them be more ambitious. . . . Actually it's my need to have a client that is more successful so that I can feel that my coaching is more worthwhile and I feel I can make a difference. (Paul)
>
> The client's value base was well outside of what I do, but hell, I'm a professional, I should be able to do that, to maintain the distance. . . . The effect of it was that actually the client was led to believe that the coach shared their views, because there was never any challenge of those views, because the coach was so busy protecting this notion that "I can work with it, it's ok." (John)

Although extensive, the literature on self-deception is still focused on the conceptual understanding of this phenomenon rather than on the implications of it for everyday life and for coaches (Clegg & Moissinac, 2005; Von Hippel & Trivers, 2011). Very little has been published in the field of counselling/psychotherapy (Cooper, 2005; Kirby, 2003; Westland & Shinebourne, 2009), with only a few attempts to consider this phenomenon from the position of those who experience self-deception or help others exploring similar experiences (Westland & Shinebourne, 2009). However, a recent study on self-deception in coaches (Bachkirova, 2015) explored this from the point of view of experienced coaches and supervisors. It offered a new model of self-deception in coaches that includes the nature of self-deception, contextual influences on self-deception, and the influence on self-deception by coaching supervision. This paper also suggested that a developmental perspective can

explain why some coaching traditions are more effective than others in dealing with self-deception of clients who seems to have different developmental needs.

In order to enhance the quality of oneself as an instrument, it seems reasonable for coaches to become more aware of their own self-deception and in turn to help their clients minimize it. However, the mechanisms that are available for this purpose have natural limitations. The first and obvious one is intentional self-reflection, but it has a limited value because self-deception is not easily available for conscious examining. Coaches may be very willing to be honest with themselves, but the nature of self-deception is such that awareness of filters develops when the need for them subsides. That is why personal examples of self-deceptions are usually historical, when a particular self-deception had already been overcome. The second mechanism is natural development, which each of us undergoes. This process leads to changes in the nature of self-deception: We still deceive ourselves but in a different way that may be more acceptable to us (Vaillant, 1992). However, this type of development is also a slow process not easily accelerated (Bachkirova, 2011, 2014).

A different way of addressing the limitations of both mechanisms of influencing self-deception is through coaching supervision, with one of its functions being to enhance the ability of the coach to see more than they currently see in their work (Bachkirova, 2008). However, supervision is not easy. It requires a courage to expose one's practice to a trusted colleague and a commitment to development instead of self-complacency, and this is not a small thing to ask and causes a lot of resistance in coaches (Salter, 2008). However, other research also shows that coaches see the value of supervision in relation to dealing with self-deception and the quality of their service as a whole (Bachkirova, 2015; Butwell, 2006; Grant, 2012; McGivern, 2009; Salter, 2008).

Coaching Supervision and Development of the Self

If we agree that the self of the coach is an essential instrument in coaching, then the focus on the self should not only be present in education and further development of coaches. Coaches would need to commit to on-going reflection to maintain the quality of this instrument of coaching. For this purpose it is useful to notice that the three conditions of good use of self as an instrument of coaching are essentially the same as the three main functions of coaching supervision.

These functions of supervision are usually described as normative, formative/developmental, and restorative (Bachkirova, Jackson, & Clutterbuck, 2011; Hawkins & Smith, 2013). It is clear that the formative/developmental function, which is concerned with identifying themes for the development coaches and facilitating their professional growth, corresponds to the first condition of understanding oneself as an instrument of coaching. The restorative function of supervision is well attuned to the second condition of looking after oneself as an instrument. Similarly, normative function includes the third condition to check for the quality and sensitivity of oneself as an instrument.

It has to be acknowledged, of course, that working with oneself as an instrument is a process. It may have a certain trajectory depending on where the coaches who embark on this journey are and on what the potential milestones of this process are (Bachkirova, 2011). Table 4 was developed on the basis of my observations as an educator and supervisor of coaches. It is aligned with various theories of adult development (e.g., Adams & Fitch, 1982; Bachkirova, 2011; Berger, 2012; Cook-Greuter, 1999; Kegan, 1982) rather than with stages of professional expertise. Three stages of the coaches' development of the self suggest particular strengths and challenges indicative for each stage and the potential dynamics for coaching supervision. This table is not designed to cover all features of the stages but to give examples that illustrate the differences between them.

Table 4

Trajectory of Self-development as an Instrument of Coaching

Aspects of self in a stage of development	Self A	Self B	Self C
Strength	Developing confidence in clients	Keeping focus on results and goals	Providing many perspectives on clients' issues
Challenge	Challenging clients	Experimenting with the process	Containing their influence
Self-deception tendency	For protection	For a gain	Subject of curiosity
How they judge quality of coaching	By the way clients feel understood and supported	By degree of the client achieving his/her goals	By own criteria congruent with their philosophy
Expectations from the supervisor	To give emotional support, to help in finding their own style	To affirm, add value to practice and increase their efficiency	To challenge more than they can challenge themselves
Need to learn in supervision	To believe in themselves	To expand perspectives on the issues	To understand and accept paradoxes

Although acceleration of the developmental process indicated in Table 3 is not inevitable, and for some coaches may not be necessary, it may provide an explanation for the issues and opportunities they face and the way supervision might be helpful in addressing them. A natural question might be asked about the potential alignment between the competent and the dialogic self, described above, and the stages of self in Table 3. However tempting this alignment may be, I believe that the competent and the dialogic self are present in each coach at any stage of development and the distinction between them is useful for observing wider influences on us and our practice. It could be said at the same time that the developmental process towards Self C would involve exploring and experimenting with the dialogic self even if not fully committing to it.

Conclusion

This paper has aimed to explore the role of the self of the coach in the coaching practice, assuming the self to be an instrument of coaching. The metaphor of the instrument implied three conditions to make good use of it in coaching practice: understanding the instrument, looking after it, and checking for quality and sensitivity. In discussion of these conditions, coaching supervision was proposed to be a viable way of addressing them and at the same time facilitating the development of the self with potential milestones in this process.

I have argued that conceptualizing the self of the coach as an instrument of practice reflects the complexity of coaching and is more in line with the paradigm that rejects a reductive and mechanistic view on individual development, professional interaction, and organizational dynamics. This perspective on the self reflects a stronger role of the person of the practitioner in comparison to professional knowledge, which might be inevitable in a changing world where availability of knowledge is growing. I believe that this perspective is equally applicable to other professions and roles that involve engagement with clients in a personally meaningful way, for instance, consultants, therapists, and even leaders of teams and organizations.

It is important to emphasize a significant implication of my position on the self for education of these practitioners. The focus of educational programs from this perspective would be on the development of the person, the reflexive ability, and personal capabilities in addition to narrowly conceived competencies. Educators would be helping practitioners aim for congruence between who they are as individuals and their professional approaches and styles, seeking to achieve a unique fit with each client, instead of advocating a “one fit for all” way to practice.

Similarly, I would like to appeal for appreciation of diversity against unjustified universality, not only in education but also in assessment of coaches. It is undeniable that the main value of coaching is that it is individually focused—unlike, for instance, training—working with a unique combination of the client's characteristics, situation, needs, and challenges. The growth of demand for coaching suggests that this principle is working. However, it is surprising to see how the same logic is not applied when we look at the development and assessment of our own expertise as coaches. If we are the main instruments of coaching, we need to celebrate the diversity that is inherent in each of us and not merely mold these instruments with competency frameworks—given of course that the basics of good practice have been achieved.

Because this paper has combined conceptual inquiry with developmental concerns for individual practitioners, I would like to finish it with what I see as the personal implications of the position that we are instruments of our coaching. Intending to provide good service for our clients, we wish the quality and the depth of our interventions to match the complexity of the clients' situations and the challenges they face. However, the principle of us as an instrument implies that the depth of practice comes from the depth of the practitioner. If this statement rings true, I would like to suggest two ways of enhancing our own depth: looking in and looking out. We can enhance our own depth by looking in—understanding our own inner nature, maybe with glimpses into our unconscious motives and drives, and embracing the role of the whole organism in our actions in addition to thinking and logic. Furthermore, we can enhance our depth by looking out—engaging with concepts that shows how our mind is shaped by external ideologies and dominant discourses. This may generate insight and a sense of freedom that are signs of a deep inquiry, which in turn may lead to a deeply meaningful dialogue with our clients.

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